SENIOR STANDS UP TO ATTACKER

85-year-old woman dragged from her home after refusing to hand over money metroNEWS

IT'S THE SEASON FOR GIVING, BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE TAKING?

Vicky Mochama in metroVIEWS

Toronto metro

Your essential daily news | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2016 | High 3°C/Low -4°C Chance of flurries

Rich, white homeowners have been controlling the city for far too long. But Jihan Abrahim is part of a movement looking to add new voices

metroNEWS

LANCE MCMILLAN/FOR METRO

IKEA to teens: Stop having sleepovers in our stores

May Warren
Metro | Toronto

The Swedish retailer IKEA issued a stern warning Wednesday to anyone planning to crash at their pad: it's trespassing and they won't stand for it.

Believe it or not, it happens. There have been 10 reported cases around the world in the past year.

GTA-based IKEA Canada spokeswoman Stephanie Harnett said there have been "attempts made" at Canadian stores but no one's been successful — yet. "We appreciate that people are interested in IKEA and want to create fun experiences," Harnett said. "However, the safety and security of our co-workers and customers is our highest priority which is why we do not allow sleepovers in our stores."

Swedish media outlets suspect the trend started after a pair of Belgian teenagers posted a YouTube video in August of their antics during an unauthorized night at one of the chain's stores.

In the video, called "Two idiots at night in Ikea," the pair start their adventure by eating Swedish meatballs, hide in a closet as the store closes and then have their run of comfy display beds.

They're seen walking out of a closet in the morning as the store opens.

Unsanctioned sleepover fun is "overrated" and often ends with "getting in trouble with the law," a Swedish spokesperson said.

WITH FILES FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Our guide to the most *overlooked* books of the year

metroLIFE

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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Mark Zuckerberg unveils artificial intelligence assistant named Jarvis, voiced by Morgan Freeman.

TORONTO'S DEADLY STREETS

It's chaos at the corner

But the police say Pillegi does too much

metro EXCLUSIVE

Exasperated crossing guard called mayor — and Tory came

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Domenic Pillegi just wants a little respect.

Standing at the corner of Avenue Road and Wilson on Wednesday morning in the freezing cold, the crossing guard says he's just there "to take care of pedestrians, take care of the kids."

His reward? Every day, Pillegi says drivers swear at him, flip him the bird — or worse.

"They'll try to drive right through me, or cut me off while I'm crossing the kids," he says.

Pillegi's so fed up with the way he's treated he called the mayor. And, to his surprise, John Tory answered.

Domenic Pillegi and Mayor John Tory stand at the corner of the Avenue Road and Wilson Avenue intersection. EDUARDO LIMA/METRO

The mayor visited Pillegi's intersection Wednesday morning and spent half an hour speaking with local parents as they walked their kids to Armour Heights Public School.

Pillegi says impatient drivers, especially those turning left or right en route to the 401, are making the intersection unsafe. Those using the crosswalk Wednesday agreed.

Carla Caetano, with her eight-year-old daughter Cayla in tow, told Tory that drivers routinely disobey the crossing guard.

"It's very dangerous," she said. "They'll cut right in front of you while you're in the crosswalk."

Daryl Papoushek said it's "open season" on pedestrians in the intersection and related stories of scooping kids out of the way of aggressive drivers.

Pillegi believes an advance green for turning cars on Wilson could help ease the tension, giving drivers a few seconds to turn before pedestrians begin crossing.

While there, the mayor recorded a public service announcement urging people to respect crossing guards. He also mused about stricter penalties for drivers who disobey guards or a possible ban on right turns on red at the intersection but didn't promise specific solutions.

Local Coun. Christin Carmichael Greb says it's a chicken-and-egg problem. Traffic congestion is worse at the intersection because so many parents drive their kids to school. Why? They don't feel safe letting their children walk, she said.

"It's driver behaviour that needs to change. People drive too aggressively for our local streets," she said.

Whatever the fix, Pillegi said it can't come fast enough.

"We've got to do something," he said. "I don't want to see someone killed because someone else was in a rush to get to work or get home."

The city's crossing guard program is overseen by Toronto police, and a number of officers accompanied Tory on his trip to Avenue and Wilson on Wednesday.

Under Ontario law, once a crossing guard has entered a crosswalk, it's illegal for drivers to pass through until everyone has finished crossing.

That can slow down traffic, said Const. Clint Stibbe, who expressed concern that crossing guard Domenic Pillegi was helping adults and older children traverse the intersection.

"He's not actually doing what he's supposed to," Stibbe said, explaining that crossing guards are only supposed to assist unaccompanied children under 12.

That doesn't fly with Pillegi.

"I'm here to help everyone," he said. "Drivers, they have a force field around them for protection, but pedestrians, they've got nothing."

"I'm here to help everyone."
Domenic Pillegi

Woman hospitalized

A woman was transported to a local trauma centre with life-threatening injuries after she was struck by a truck in Downsview on Wednesday morning, said paramedics.

The collision occurred at Keele Street and Wilson Avenue at around 10:00 a.m.

Roads were closed in the area to allow for an investigation.

Police assisted Toronto Paramedic Services in the emergency run. There was no information on the cause of the collision at press time. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Isiah Martin TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Driver faces $1K fine, 3-month ban

Isiah Martin was given a $1,000 fine and three-month driving ban for careless driving that resulted in the death of Brad Stevenson.

Less than three months after losing his beloved 27-year-old son to cancer, athletic retiree Brad Stevenson, 61, lost everything else to a careless driver.

Motorist Isiah Martin's penalty for darting a GMC across six lanes of Scarborough traffic into the path of a TTC bus, and then pinwheeling into pedestrians Stevenson and Grant Underhill, 64 — killing Stevenson and gravely injuring his old friend — was a $1,000 fine and three-month driving ban.

Two other charges were dropped in return for his guilty plea to careless driving.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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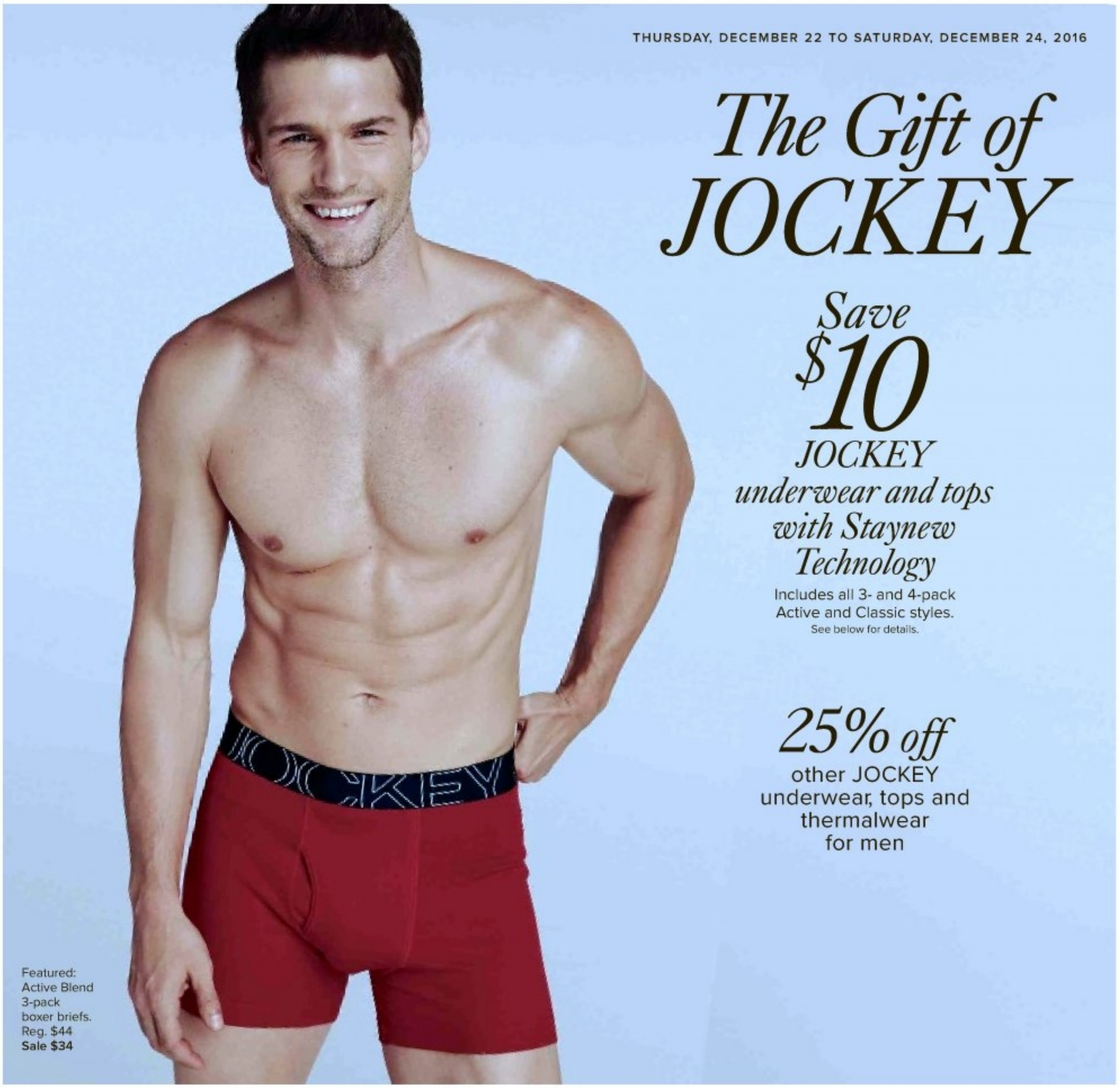

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Different voices in the diverse city

Jihan Abrahim, 29, is a member of the city's volunteer planning review panel, which provides feedback on development proposals and policies. She says the experience has helped her understand how complex urban planning can be in Toronto. LANCE MCMILLAN/FOR METRO

URBAN PLANNING

Review panel is younger, with visible minorities

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world, but you wouldn't be able to tell by attending an urban planning consultation.

"The people who come to our meetings are generally white, generally affluent homeowners," said Daniel Fusca, head of stakeholder engagement for Toronto's planning department.

That's a problem, Fusca says, because it means the department tasked with planning the entire city is only hearing from part of it.

To fix it, Fusca and his colleagues created the Toronto Planning Review Panel. They sent out 12,000 invitations, and used a lottery process to pick 28 applicants who, together, reflect a city where nearly half of residents rent, 49 per cent are visible minorities and the median age is 39.

Over the past year, the panel members have reviewed the city's new complete streets guidelines and pushed for policies requiring more family-sized condo units.

Jihan Abrahim, a 29-year-old Etobicoke resident, told Metro that joining the panel has given her a real insight into how — and why — the city makes certain decisions.

Bejaimal Satyanand, 58, said his time on the panel has completely changed how he views development. Instead of going to community meetings to complain about tall buildings and density, he now champions them.

"The last time I went to a neighbourhood consultation, one of the things I said is that 90 per cent of the people coming to the area are immigrants, and like all of us, they want to be house owners. But if we don't build these houses, they'll never get the chance," he said.

Fusca says going to review panel meetings is very different from typical planning consultations. Whereas wealthier homeowners are usually concerned with property values and the character of neighbourhoods, he said the 28 panellists take a more "holistic" approach.

"It's not just a perspective of self-interest," he said. "They worry about social justice and the environment and how vulnerable people might be affected."

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REAL ESTATE

So popular that people lost shoes

A Vaughan home that sold for $400,000 more than the asking price this week drew so many viewers that people lost their shoes at the open houses.

It's not unusual for homes to sell for tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars more than the listed price in the frenzied Toronto area real estate market.

Despite its dated condition, the estate sale property, which sold on Monday for $1.1 million, attracted about 800 visitors over the course of three open houses — and 50 offers ahead of the designated offer presentation time.

It was a deliberate decision to price the 2,670-square-foot detached house near Dufferin Road and Steeles Avenue at an unusually low $699,900, said agent Steven Atsaves of Royal LePage Grange Hall Realty.

This dated house sold for $400,000 over the asking price. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

That, combined with a shortage of listings in the pre-holiday period, pulled in the crowds at the open houses, he said.

"I purposely put it for sale without renovating or painting it. If you renovate or paint it, we're going to go into the spring market by the time we put it up, and then we're going to have a lot more competition as well and the risk of the market turning," he said.

"Instead of from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, I did two open houses from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday. I knew the influx of people coming was going to be insane," said Atsaves.

It was so busy, people struggled to find their footwear among the dozens of shoes at the door, said Atsaves. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

MARKET WATCH

Unaffordable city
Toronto's screaming real estate price have made it the least affordable market in the country, with the relatively scarce supply of detached housing one of the leading stressors, according to RBC.

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The Toronto Zoo's white lion cubs will be gone by early 2017. COURTESY J. SKEEN/TORONTO ZOO

White lions leaving home

TORONTO ZOO

Cubs headed to Montreal's Parc Safari in the New Year

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

In a scene straight out of The Lion King, the Toronto Zoo's four white lion cubs will soon be leaving home to make their own way in the world.

Hank, Harrison, Oliver and Gus, who are now about 15 months old and averaging 225 pounds, will be moving to Parc Safari in Quebec in the New Year, said Maria Franke, the zoo's mammal curator.

With the lions nearing maturity, Franke said the move is about avoiding conflicts with the zoo's resident breeding male lion.

"They're growing fast," she said.

"And they're just getting really big and rambunctious."

It may be a sad day for some, but Franke said it's all part of the circle of life.

"It would not be common for male lion cubs to remain with the family pride as they age.

The whole purpose is for them to disburse and when they get older, find their own pride," she said.

The cub's parents, adult white lions Fintan and Mikali, and their aunt, Lemon, will stay at the zoo.

Visitors can catch one last glimpse of the cubs over the holiday break.

FOODSHARE

Fresh idea for donations

A generous donation to a Toronto organization will be providing local families in need with an invaluable Christmas present: fresh, healthy food.

Two thousand families will be able to have a home-cooked meal thanks to an anonymous gift of $50,000 to FoodShare, a local non-profit organization that provides families with fresh produce.

Volunteers are hurrying to pack food provided by local farmers and the Ontario Food Terminal, after the donation was finalized last week.

Heidi Pyper, spokesperson at FoodShare Toronto, says that families will have access to "nourishing, fresh produce" just in time for the holiday season.

"Most holiday food donations collect non-perishable items, but our food boxes are providing fresh and nutritious produce straight from Ontario's food terminal to families that don't have as much," she said.

The families will receive three pounds of apples, five oranges, cranberries, a head of lettuce, butternut squash, cabbage, a two-pound bag of carrots, a two-pound bag of onions, a 10-pound bag of potatoes, bananas and pineapples. About 51 per cent is local food.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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BURLINGTON

GO station completion delayed yet again

The long delayed Burlington GO station is turning out to be more of a wait station, with construction not expected to be completed until at least next spring.

Construction of the $13.8-million project began in fall 2012 and was set to be completed by spring 2014, but almost three years later, the station is still in the lurch.

The new station was commissioned to accommodate the increased ridership and address problems with crowding, but over four years since construction began, fences draped in black cloth, wooden boarding and caution tape still block off areas.

Metrolinx, responsible for overseeing the construction of the station, wrote in a statement that it "is disappointed with this contractor's (Bondfield) performance to date. We share the public's frustration and apologize for the delays and appreciate their patience."

But, added Metrolinx, they won't be cancelling the contract with the Ontario-based construction company, Bondfield Construction.

"We evaluated our options and cancelling the contract would delay the project further by more than 2 years — this would mean stopping the ongoing work, retendering the project, and then beginning fresh with a new contractor," wrote Metrolinx.

In-house counsel to Bondfield Paul Dipede said the company "continues to work cooperatively and vigorously with Metrolinx to overcome issues that have occurred at the Burlington GO project."

The east tunnel of the station is still incomplete, as are ticket booths, elevators and the east waiting room, wrote Metrolinx. It's expected to be completed in early 2017. The roof structure and roof system will also be under construction into 2017. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

In a statement the TTC has said it would "hold Bombardier to account" over repeated delays in delivering 204 contracted streetcars. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

30th new streetcar delivered

TTC

But Bombardier still more than 70 cars behind schedule

Thirty down. Just 174 to go.

Bombardier announced on Wednesday afternoon that earlier in the day it had delivered its 30th streetcar to the TTC, meeting a deadline that the Quebec-based rail manufacturer set out earlier this year.

But while the company announced the delivery in a press release under the headline "Bombardier meets its 2016 delivery commitment to the TTC," it remains far behind the original schedule for the order for 204 cars.

A timetable set out in 2012 stipulated that the TTC would have shipped more than 100 by now.

"We are honoured to be a partner in the GTHA's efforts to improve mobility and bring the benefits of these high-quality and reliable low-floor streetcars to the Toronto transit riders," Benoît Brossoit, president of Bombardier Transportation, Americas Region, was quoted as saying in the press release.

"Bombardier recognizes that need to accelerate its deliveries to the TTC to meet expectations, and we are deploying all necessary resources to do so," the statement said.

After revising its delivery schedule several times, Bombardier slashed its expected output again in April and proposed delivering a total of 30 cars by the end of 2016. Just three months earlier, it had pledged to supply 54 by the end of the year.

The repeated delays to the $1.25-billion order have exasperated TTC leaders, and the transit agency responded to the latest delivery with a muted statement.

"Bombardier committed earlier this year to have 30 cars in Toronto by the end of 2016. On that, we are pleased the car is here," wrote TTC spokesperson Brad Ross in an email. "Of course, we need more cars and look forward to seeing improvements to delivery in 2017. We will continue to hold Bombardier to account and delivery of all 204 cars by 2019."

A TTC report published last week said that transit agency staff believe "there is a risk" that Bombardier will miss the deadline for completing the order by the end of 2019.

The next day Mayor John Tory and TTC chair Josh Colle issued an open letter to the company in which they accused it of a "complete failure to perform," and blamed delays in the streetcar order for service disruptions on the transit network.

The TTC is already suing the company for $50 million in damages, but the letter warned of possible further legal action.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

> **Bombardier recognizes that need to accelerate its deliveries to the TTC to meet expectations.**
> Benoît Brossoit

Migrant youth share hopes and fears

PUBLICATIONS

Stories in new book meant to start a conversation

What's it like to be an outcast for lacking immigrant status?

How does it feel to be rejected by employers because your social insurance number indicates you are a refugee?

These are some of the questions a dozen youth with precarious immigration status in Toronto explore in Seeds of Hope: Creating a Future in the Shadows, a new book published by Life Cycle Books Ltd. in conjunction with the FCJ Refugee Centre.

"We have all had these experiences coming to Canada, always in transit," said one of the writers, Destin Bujang, 25, who fled Cameroon to Toronto in 2012 and is still fighting to obtain his status here.

"When someone finds themselves in the same situation like ours, they should know they are not alone."

The idea of the book project, made possible with an ArtReach Foundation grant, came from Bujang, and the book's co-editors, siblings Francisco and Paloma Villegas, who drew on the inspiration from the book Underground Undergrads: UCLA undocumented immigrant students speak out.

Tanya Aberman, the project's co-ordinator and one of its editors, said the book highlights newcomers' struggle between hope and hopelessness. The stories, she said, are meant to create a conversation among young people with precarious status, their allies, the immigration system and the Canadian public. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Sheriff Alimi, Julia Amanda Salmon and Destin Bujang contributed stories to Seeds of Hope. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The front of Tristan Brown's vehicle after ice flew off a truck on Highway 401 and hit his windshield. COURTESY TRISTAN BROWN

ROAD SAFETY

Sheet of ice off truck smashes windshield

The warm afterglow of a Christmas family gathering was shattered for a St. Catharines motorist Monday, when a sheet of ice from off a transport truck struck his vehicle on highway 401, smashing his windshield.

Tristan Brown was driving along Highway 401 in Trenton, when a commercial truck merged onto the highway. Brown moved over to give the truck some space when he noticed chunks of ice flying off the vehicle. He sped up, attempting to avoid it but was unsuccessful, as a large piece of ice hit his windshield.

> **The truck driver did not receive a ticket or even a warning.**
> Tristan Brown

"It was like it was in slow motion," Brown, a 29-year-old healthcare worker from St. Catharines, said. "You could just see it and I knew right away that it was going to hit my truck if I slowed down or sped up. I just saw it coming. It was surreal almost."

The windshield of his Ford F-150 pickup truck was severely cracked but no glass entered the car. His rearview mirror almost broke off, hanging and swinging back and forth.

"The wild thing is what if I swerved and there was someone next to me and I hit a family or something? Brutal," Brown said.

He immediately began honking and sped up, to get the truck driver's attention. And once he did, the pair pulled over to the side of the road and called the police. When a police officer arrived, no charges were laid against the driver of the commercial truck.

"The truck driver did not receive a ticket or even a warning," Brown said in an email describing the incident.

Const. Juliane Porritt of the Ontario Provincial Police said cases like this are classed as a motor vehicle collision. In such instances, "when the damage done to the secondary vehicle is under $2,000 the drivers exchange information and it's up to them to settle the claim through their insurance company." TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

PLATFORM CHANGES AT UNION STATION

Started December 19th

Due to construction

What's Changing

As of December 19, we made platform changes to start the next phase of the Union Station Revitalization. Construction will continue on the train shed roof, tracks and station improvements. Please check our website for more information, and be sure to check the departure boards before heading to your platform.

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METROLINX

METRO ARTIST TAKE

Advent of a novel Insta-calendar

Actor gets in character each day in December to explore Christmas experience.

LUKE SIMCOE METRO

One Toronto actor has invented a new take on the advent calendar — and a new way to explore the individual meaning behind the holidays.

Since Dec. 1, Caroline Lesley has been posting a different image and video every day on her Instagram account.

In each video, she portrays a different character — everyone from a toy store employee to a dominatrix — and shows how they relate to the holidays.

For example, Lesley's "hipster" character loves attending ugly sweater parties, while a character called "the widow" despairs about seeing her late husband in every twinkling light.

"For some people, Christmas can be a lonely time, for other people there's a lot of joy, and everything in between," Lesley said.

Lesley considers the project "half art installation, half acting challenge."

Just like an advent calendar, the final character will be revealed on Dec. 25.

However, Lesley is considering ways to keep the project going after the season ends.

As for her experience of the holidays, Lesley said she's just glad to be back in Toronto after stints in New York and Los Angeles.

"Christmas in Toronto is special to me because I grew up here," she said.

"I have kids now and being here in the snow and taking them to the places I used to go is really special."

FOLLOW HER

Follow actor Caroline Lesley on Instagram: @caroline.lesley

ABOUT THIS SERIES **Artists can change the way we interact with the world around us** by offering new takes on the ordinary. Metro's sharing some of the work that's happening around Toronto. Send your visual stories to jason.logan@metronews.ca

Actor Caroline Lesley is portraying 25 different characters for her Instagram advent calendar.
CONTRIBUTED

He was 'just a punk'

HALIFAX

Senior recounts brutal attack that outraged a city

Zane Woodford
Metro | Halifax

An 85-year-old woman says she was "petrified" as she was repeatedly punched in the face and dragged from her home during a brutal assault in Halifax.

Police say they were called to Jeanette MacDonald's home Tuesday night.

MacDonald said she was home alone when there was a knock at the door. She called out to ask who was there, and when there was no answer, she went to the door.

"I opened the door, and the first thing he said was, 'Give me the money.' I said, 'What the hell are you talking about, I'm not giving you no money.' And he hit me with his fist in my face," MacDonald said in an interview Wednesday morning.

Jeanette MacDonald was bruised after a home invasion at her basement apartment. JEFF HARPER/METRO

MacDonald said the man, who she'd never seen before, told her he had a gun and knife. She continued to refuse his demands for money, and he dragged her outside.

"He said, 'Here's one for ya,' and he let me have it right in the face again," she said.

> **"I said, 'What the hell are you talking about, I'm not giving you no money.'**
> Jeanette MacDonald

MacDonald's neighbours rushed to her side when they heard her cries for help.

"I was screaming, I couldn't stand the pain," MacDonald said.

She said the suspect ran away behind her home.

"Just a punk, that's all he was," MacDonald said.

Paramedics treated MacDonald's injuries at the scene. On Wednesday morning, she had two black eyes, a large bruise on her chest, and her hand was swollen.

"I'm not feeling too bad now, like I was at first, but I'm sore," she said.

Halifax police spokeswoman Const. Dianne Penfound said Wednesday afternoon that police had no further leads or information on the case.

Woman claims she was fired for lack of heels

Haley Ryan
Metro | Halifax

A Dartmouth single mom is questioning whether her recent firing from a popular Halifax nightclub was over high heels, but her employer says they did everything "in line with labour standards."

Ally Robinson, 25, said she's worked in the service industry for years, including at Grafton Connor Group locations like Cheers, and as a bartender at The Dome since October. Last Friday, Robinson said a manager sent her home for not wearing high heels during her shift.

The next day, Robinson said she was dismissed by the same woman who told her she was being let go due to not wearing heels, but then added, according to Robinson, "I don't need to give you a reason at all," because the 25-year-old was still under the probation period.

"It doesn't seem fair," Robinson says.

AFGHANISTAN

First sight of kids was in hostage video

The parents of a Canadian man held in Afghanistan say a recently released video of their son and his family marks the first time they've seen their two grandchildren, who were born in captivity.

Canadian Joshua Boyle and his wife, Caitlan Coleman, were kidnapped in 2012 while travelling in northern Afghanistan.

Boyle's parents, Patrick and Linda, said they watched the video Monday, getting their first look at their grandsons.

TWITTER

"It is an indescribable emotional sense one has watching a grandson making faces at the camera, while hearing our son's leg chains clanging up and down on the floor," the Boyles said.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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TURKEY

Erdogan says assassin linked to U.S. cleric

Turkey's president on Wednesday implicated a U.S.-based Muslim cleric in the killing of Russia's envoy to Turkey, saying the policeman who carried out the attack was a member of his "terror organization."

Ambassador Andrei Karlov was killed Monday by a gunman in front of stunned onlookers at a photo exhibition in Ankara. The assassin, Mevlut Mert Altintas of Ankara's riot police squad, was killed in a police operation.

"He (Altintas) was a member of the FETO terrorist organization. There is no point in hiding this," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said during a joint news conference with his visiting Albanian counterpart. "From the places he was raised to his connections — that's what they point at."

Turkey has accused Fethullah Gulen — a former ally who has turned into Erdogan's top foe — of trying to destabilize Turkey and says his movement is behind a failed military coup in July aimed at toppling the Turkish leader. Gulen has denied any involvement in the coup. His movement also condemned "in the strongest terms" the ambassador's assassination.

Turkey is pressing the U.S. to extradite Gulen so he may be prosecuted for the coup attempt and other alleged crimes.

Erdogan said that Turkey's intelligence agency was also looking into Altintas' possible foreign connections, saying there were "certain clues" indicating overseas links. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALSO IN TURKEY

- Bana Alabed, a seven-year-old Syrian girl who was evacuated Monday from Aleppo and whose mother ran a Twitter account in her name met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. The account has garnered some 354,000 followers.

Officials walk through the rubble of the San Pablito fireworks market that exploded in Tultepec on the outskirts of Mexico City, on Wednesday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Search for loved ones and answers

SAN PABLITO

Officials say it's too early to identify cause of explosion

Relatives of workers at a fireworks market flattened by a deadly chain-reaction explosion searched hospitals for loved ones Wednesday as attention focused on apparent lax security that allowed vendors to display their dangerous wares in the passageways between stalls.

Health Secretary Cesar Gomez Monge of Mexico State, where the San Pablito Market is located, said another victim died in a hospital, raising the fatal toll to 32. About 46 people remained hospitalized, five of them in such serious condition that they were fighting for their lives, he added. Ten of the injured were minors including one girl with burns over 90 per cent of her body.

Juana Antolina Hernandez, who has run a stand for 22 years in San Pablito next to one operated by her parents, escaped the market in a mad dash when the explosions began Tuesday afternoon. The following day she was one of the disconsolate residents waiting outside a local morgue.

"I can't find my father, and my mother is very badly burned," said Hernandez, 49. "I am waiting here for them to tell me if my father is here, but up to this point, nothing."

San Pablito was especially well stocked for the holidays and bustling with hundreds of shoppers when the blast reduced the market to a stark expanse of ash, rubble and the scorched metal, casting a pall over the Christmas season. Dramatic video of the explosion showed a towering plume of smoke that was lit up by a staccato of bangs and flashes of light, the third such incident to ravage the market on the northern outskirts of Mexico's capital since 2005. Officials said it was too early to identify a cause of the blasts. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN

Officials monitored truck attack suspect

German officials had deemed the Tunisian man being sought in a manhunt across Europe a threat long before a truck plowed into a Christmas market in Berlin — and even kept him under covert surveillance for six months this year before halting the operation.

Now the international manhunt for Anis Amri — considered the prime suspect in Monday's deadly rampage — is raising questions about how closely German authorities are monitoring the hundreds of known Islamic extremists in the country. The issue puts new pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is being lambasting her for allowing hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers to enter the country. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Aid groups warn of crisis in Mongolia

EXTREME WEATHER

Livestock being decimated by an unusually harsh winter

Another unusually harsh winter in Mongolia that's decimating livestock and sending temperatures to minus 56 degrees Celsius (minus 70 Fahrenheit) may create a humanitarian crisis, with worse conditions still to come, aid groups warn.

Save the Children and the International Federation of the Red Cross said Wednesday that this winter will likely see vast swathes of the Mongolian steppe affected by the extreme weather phenomenon known in Mongolia as "dzud."

A dzud typically happens once a decade but could strike for the second consecutive year. The dzud last year killed more than 1 million animals, afflicting the majority of Mongolians who depend on livestock for food, milk and income.

The Mongolian government said last week it met with international organizations including Save the Children, the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Program to discuss efforts to deliver heating, fuel and medical supplies amid "worsening" conditions and heavy snowfall.

Aid groups say the situation is compounded by last year's harsh winter and a deep recession amid a market bust for Mongolia's mineral exports. The country is struggling to repay debt with its hard currency stocks while household savings have also evaporated.

Red Cross disaster program manager in Mongolia Davaajargal Batdorj said more livestock deaths are expected this year. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A herder walks past a pile of dead animals in the hills of Hentii province after a severe snowstorm in 2001. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Broadband a basic service: Regulator

Canada's telecom regulator has declared broadband internet access a basic service across the country, just like current landline telephone service.

But making full access to ultra-high-speed services a reality could cost tens of billions of dollars, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission said Wednesday that achieving the goal will take a coordinated effort by it, businesses and governments.

The aim is to ensure service providers (ISPs) offer internet services nationwide at speeds of at least 50 megabits per second for downloading data, and 10 Mbps for uploads, the CRTC said. Currently, about 82 per cent of households and businesses receive that level of service. The CRTC wants that increased to 90 per cent by 2021.

ISPs will also be required to offer unlimited data options for fixed broadband services. THE CANADIAN PRESS

EMPLOYMENT

Face-to-face crucial for young job seekers

A report from the federal government's expert panel on youth employment points to a need to move away from digital services for young, first-time job seekers and instead offer more person-to-person contacts and services.

The panel described how young people complete hundreds of online job applications without receiving any response from employers and that the reliance on using personal networks to find jobs is unreasonably high.

Young people with the most success at landing a job do so through the people they know and for those without such a network, the necessity to build connections can be overly intimidating, the report said.

"We are deluding ourselves if we think that by digitizing the job application process we are making it more democratic," said panel chairwoman Vass Bednar. THE CANADIAN PRESS

metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Thursday, December 22, 2016

CHANTAL HÉBERT ON POLITICAL NEWS' DECENTRALIZATION

The days when there was something special or newsworthy about a broadcaster serving up a prime minister to a festive nation have gone.

Once a staple of the holiday news season, the televised prime ministerial fireside chats are well on the way to joining the ghosts of Christmases past.

The CBC and Radio-Canada — among others — have opted out of the format, rightly concluding that the days when there was something special or, for that matter, newsworthy about deferentially serving up a prime minister to a festive nation had gone.

So have the days when a government leader had to rely on a handful of major networks to reach a national audience.

Interviews with the prime minister are a dime a dozen this December. On top of various year-end Parliament Hill interviews and a news conference, Trudeau has spent the past week on a year-end tour.

At the end of last week, he was in Montreal taking questions from Radio-Canada viewers. This week he spent time in Vancouver and Calgary.

There was a time when a contingent of Parliament Hill reporters would have tagged along. But trips outside the parliamentary precinct are so few now, as it is possible to catch Trudeau live in action from one's computer at no cost to media organizations.

This year marked the 150th anniversary of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. For its members, it was a bittersweet occasion.

In tandem with the larger journalism universe the gallery's membership has been shrinking. That may be even truer of the institution's collective influence. The challenging economics of journalism tell only part of the story.

When I came to Parliament Hill in the late '80s, Le Devoir's Montreal-based justice reporter would hop on a bus and travel to Ottawa every time the Supreme Court released a major ruling.

Collecting it in person was the only way to get the text of a decision on the day it was rendered. For that reason, larger news organizations often based their justice reporter on Parliament Hill.

With the exception of the televised House debates, pretty much anything that happened around or on the Hill was only accessible to journalists who were physically present on the premises. It was impossible to keep up with the narrative at a distance from the capital. The members of the gallery truly were the ears and eyes of Canadians on Parliament Hill for more than a century.

These days, most of the fireworks in Canadian political news comes from reporters and commentators outside Ottawa.
THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE

But today, the Globe and Mail's André Picard writes the most authoritative health-policy column on offer … from Montreal.

In English as in French, the bulk of the immigration and foreign-policy commentary and analysis no longer emanates from Parliament Hill bureaus.

Every year, the budget lockup draws a gaggle of columnists and editorialists who normally toil in Montreal and Toronto. With access to federal finance documents at the tip of anyone's fingers, more fiscal policy coverage than ever is done outside the federal capital. And, of course, it is no longer necessary to have a desk a few blocks down from the Supreme Court to obtain its rulings in real time.

The much-watched At Issue panel on CBC's The National has never had a permanent member whose exclusive workplace was Parliament Hill. (I have been splitting my time between the federal capital and Montreal for 20 years.) And yet parliamentary insiders regularly vote it as the most influential media panel.

Over the years, a lot of policy expertise and knowledge has been farmed out of the press gallery, and, with it, many of the relationships that ministers and mandarins used to nurture with those who were on the beats that pertained to their portfolios.

As a consequence but also as the result of the practice of clickbaiting, the ratio of politics reporting versus public policy coverage coming out of the parliamentary press has steadily increased. The press gallery has become more diverse but polls suggest its output has tended to become less germane to the priorities of voters.

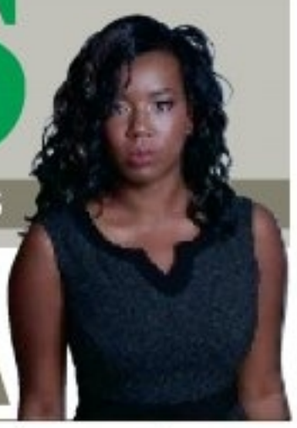
Parliament Hill remains the only place in the country where conflicting political currents come to clash. The dynamics are a must-watch for anyone who wants to understand how complex Canada is. That is not easily done via a computer screen.

It is impossible to imagine national political coverage without a parliamentary component. But regardless of their number, the daily reporting of Parliament Hill media insiders is probably no more likely to be restored to pride of place in the national conversation than the cosy fireside chats of the not-so-distant past.

Over the years, a lot of policy expertise and knowledge has been farmed out of the parliamentary press gallery.

Chantal Hébert is a national affairs writer.

VICKY MOCHAMA



It's better to give than to receive, but taking has its place, too

In the lead-up to the Plunderer-Elect of the United States taking the oath of office, it's become clear that this is the Age of the Thief.

Almost every cabinet appointment seems designed to enrich either the Trumps or their billionaire friends. Trump is draining the swamp but only so he can sell the water back to the thirsty swamp dwellers in gold-embossed bottles.

The next four years will consist of so many bold acts of theft. And not just in the United States.

In Toronto, police are searching for a white male who has robbed five downtown banks in the last month. However, knowing that the public loves a criminal they can cheer for — hello, all superheroes — the police have adorably named him the "lunchtime bandit." Such creativity from a force that has only managed to come up with Black Male Known To Police for so many other suspects.

(If I'm ever arrested, please tell the police my moniker is White Woman.)

The robber is brazen but only because he knows that no one suspects clean-cut white men of crimes. He can simply slide a note to a teller saying he's armed and be out of there in minutes.

According to Staff Insp. Mike Earl, this particular perp might not be all bad. "Maybe he's never been in trouble before," he said. "Maybe he's an educated individual who's down and out and this is his only hope to get some kind of money."

That is exactly the kind of empathy that we'll need in the coming years. No one is a criminal anymore! Donald Trump isn't a fascist and a kleptocrat. He's just "an educated individual" trying to make a living.

For that reason, Doris Payne is my Pilferer of the Year. Doris is an international jewel thief who has spent over five decades stealing expensive jewelry. And getting away with it. My girl Doris, who is 86, was arrested just last week for stealing a necklace in suburban Atlanta.

While former stockbroker and convicted fraudster Jordan Belfort got an Oscar-worthy portrayal by Leonardo DiCaprio, Doris's 50 years of high-stakes thievery has so far only generated rumours of a Halle Berry-attached biopic.

(DiCaprio himself seems to like a scammer; he also played conman-turned-FBI consultant Frank Abagnale in 2002's Catch Me If You Can.)

Doris Payne's story is like the Thomas Crowne Affair meets the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, but starring a fabulous and unrepentant black woman. What does a black woman have to steal to get Viola Davis to play her?

In this season of giving, let's not forget to celebrate the takers.

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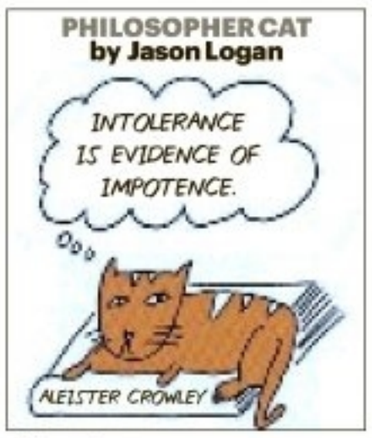

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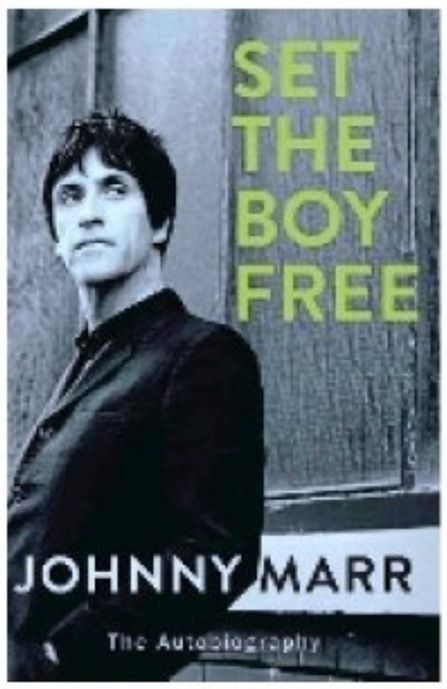
metro LIFE $7B

Your essential daily news

Movie magic is real: Disney is first studio to break $7 billion globally at the box office this year

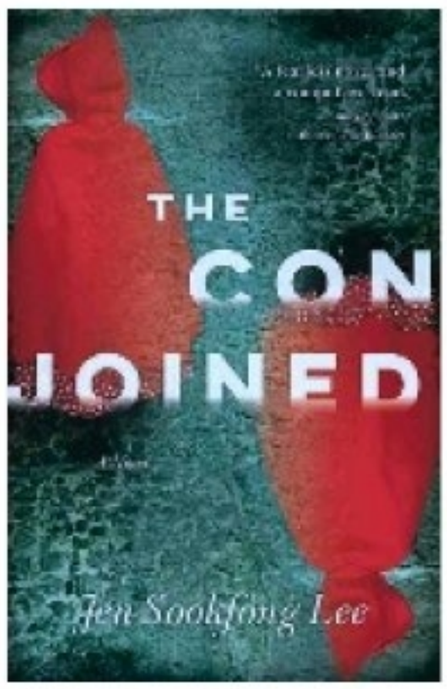
Overlooked but wonderful reads

With thousands of books published each year, narrowing down a new holiday read or gift can be daunting. There are the award winners and the bestsellers, the book club picks and the big names. But if you're looking for something a little different, here are five titles worth seeking out: **SUE CARTER/FOR METRO**



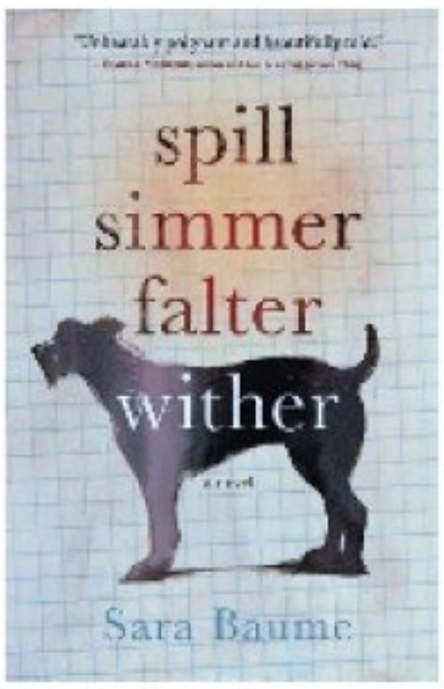
The fascinating Mr Smiths

In a year dominated by memoirs from Bruce Springsteen, Amy Schumer and Carrie Fisher, it was easy to miss Johnny Marr's **Set the Boy Free**. Marr and Morrissey, who co-formed the beloved 1980s band the Smiths, became as famous for their contentious break-up as their writing partnership. But Marr's entertaining autobiography keeps the mudslinging to a minimum, delivering a delightful history of a life dedicated to music.



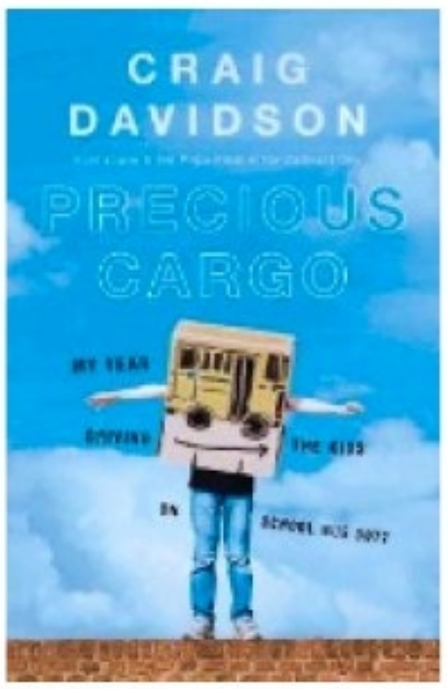
Thrill ride through Vancouver

Vancouver author Jen Sookfong Lee combines literary and crime fiction in her third novel **The Conjoined**, about a social worker who discovers the bodies of two girls — who turn out to be long-missing troubled foster children — in her recently deceased mother's freezers. Lee draws from Vancouver's social history, pop culture and an exploration of family dynamics for a woman-focused, refreshing take on the traditional thriller.



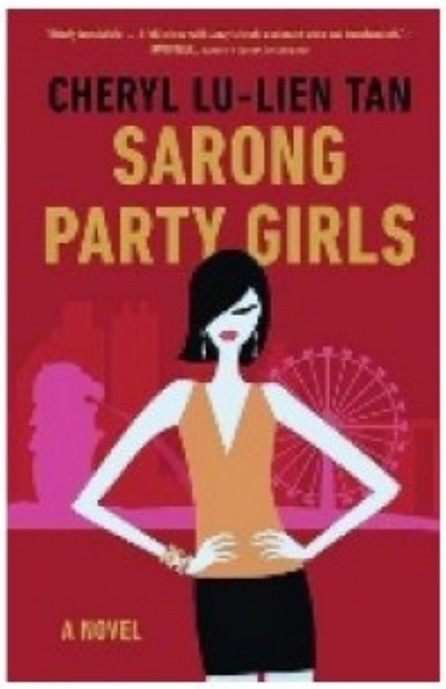
Man and dog in dark times

Before it was published in Canada this year, Irish writer Sara Baume received a long list of accolades in the U.K. for her debut novel **Spill Simmer Falter Wither**, set in a small village inspired by her own home. Baume breathes new life into an old trope about a man and his dog, with beautiful, lyrical language and a startling, dark conclusion. This is one of the most quietly devastating books of the year.



A funny, charming bus journey

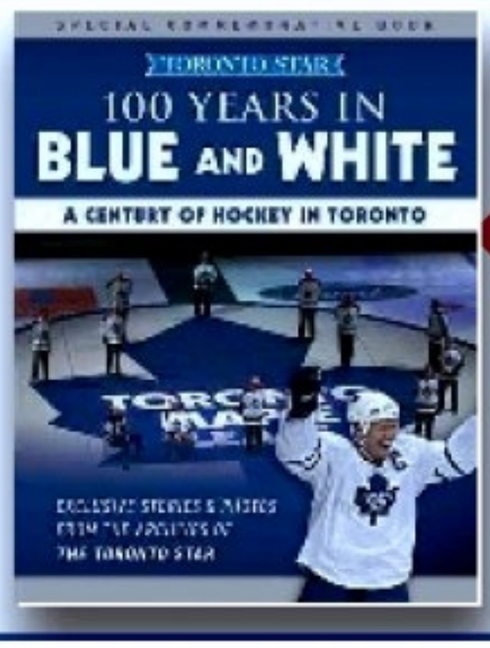
Craig Davidson has earned a tough-guy reputation, both for his hard-hitting books (and the film adaptation of Rust and Bone) and his horror-writing pseudonym Nick Cutter. In his charming memoir **Precious Cargo: My Year of Driving the Kids on School Bus 3077**, the Calgary author recalls a tough period when he took a job driving a bus for special-needs students, proving that he is also sensitive and empathetic, with a sharp sense of humour.



Single women on a mission

Journalist Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's first novel, **Sarong Party Girls**, explores the lives of Jazzy and her friends, all twenty-something Singapore women on a mission to snag rich *ang moh* (Western expat) husbands and to give birth to "Chanel babies." Told in 'Singlish' — a hybrid patois of Singaporean English — Tan, who did plenty of research to capture the scene, exposes a sordid but fascinating world of nightclubs and lounges ruled by racism and misogyny.

CANADA'S GAME. TORONTO'S TEAM.



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Bringing back an old-school Legend

INTERVIEW

Singer's role in La La Land sees him return to musical past

When he was a kid, multiple Grammy winner John Legend was in high school musicals, including You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown and Fiddler on the Roof. So perhaps it was in the cards for him to take on two roles in La La Land, a movie being credited with re-energizing the classic genre.

Written and directed by Damien Chazelle, La La Land opens on Christmas Day.

Legend is both an executive producer on the film and acts and sings onscreen as hit-seeking bandleader Keith. To prepare for the part, Legend worked with an acting coach and learned to play guitar. He also wrote the song he performs with co-star Ryan Gosling, Start a Fire.

Legend's Keith is a longtime friend of jazz musician Sebastian (Gosling), who seems far away from his dream of opening his own club. Keith's band is enjoying success with a far more commercial sound than the purity that Sebastian champions. When Keith offers him a job, it comes at a cost to Sebastian's relationship with struggling actress Mia (Emma Stone) and his vow to stay loyal to his music.

A co-writer on Glory, a Best Original Song Oscar winner from the film Selma, Legend sat down during the Toronto International Film Festival for a Canadian exclusive interview to talk about his work in La La Land.

What job came first: the executive producer or the acting?
It was all kind of bundled together in the same conversation. They wanted me to write a song for (La La Land) and possibly perform in it as an actor . . . and come on as an executive producer to help with the music. But (Chazelle) held out the possibility that he might want me to play Keith and I looked at the role and said, 'Yeah, I could do this.' I understand Keith as a character, and it's something I think I (could) do. Damien took a leap of faith because he had never seen me act before. He had to just speculate that I might be good at it and I think he's OK with his decision now.

We don't know much about the friendship between Sebastian and Keith. Did you work out a backstory?
We talked about that with Damien and basically the idea was that these guys probably went to music school together and they both kind of have the same foundation as talented musicians who come up through the jazz school of thought, but one of them decides to cleave through that tradition more and the other one decides to kind of push himself beyond the boundaries of what traditional jazz would allow. Damien didn't want one to be perceived as inherently better than the other, but just different choices. This has been seen in films before, this idea of selling your soul for rock'n'roll. Right. And so (Chazelle) wanted that tension, but he also didn't want Keith to be a crappy musician that everyone thought, 'Well, that's terrible.' He wanted it to be a viable option; this is good in its own way. It's different from what Gosling's character's trying to do, but it's still a viable option.

You feel their story, you understand what it's like to have a dream and to want to pursue that.
John Legend

John Legend with Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling in La La Land. DALE ROBINETTE/ENTERTAINMENT ONE

Why do you want to be involved with movies?
I've always loved history and . . . a lot of the films that we get involved with and the television shows we get involved with are kind of historically based. And I think film has a power to connect in a really powerful way and a beautiful way, and I love the interaction of film and music, and most of it in things I work on have that interaction where we write songs for it. For instance, Underground, a television show that we produced (for WGN America), we were very involved in the music, so I feel like it's an extension of my music career and my career as a storyteller and as an artist.

Are movie musicals an old-fashioned concept?
Great stories never go out of style. Great characters never go out of style. Great filmmaking never goes out of style. And I think the power of this film is that you feel a real human connection to Sebastian and Mia, you feel their story, you understand what it's like to have a dream and to want to pursue that. It's really great writing and great dancing, great performances. What's not to like? Even if this genre is supposedly on life support, I think Damien certainly provided enough jolt to it and reinvigorated it for 2016.

How does Ryan Gosling hold up as a musician?
Oh, he's so good! He really worked on being a great pianist for this and I was so impressed. And they (Stone and Gosling) sound great together, their singing and their dancing is just magical. It kind of took me by surprise to see how beautifully they were dancing together.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Lena Dunham said she would never intentionally 'trivialize the challenges of terminating a pregnancy.' THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Dunham apologizes over 'joke'

ENTERTAINMENT

On her podcast star said she wished she had an abortion

Lena Dunham has apologized for saying she wished she had an abortion. Dunham made the comment on last week's episode of her Women of the Hour podcast, while talking about a self-realization.

She said that, even though she speaks against stigmatizing abortion, she found herself saying adamantly that she had never had one when she was asked to be part of a project involving women discussing their abortions.

In reference to this contradiction, she said: "Now, I can say that I still haven't had an abortion, but I wish I had."

The comment drew criticism online.

On Tuesday, the Girls star apologized on Instagram for what she called "a distasteful joke."

She said she "would never, ever intentionally trivialize the emotional and physical challenges of terminating a pregnancy."

"My only goal is to increase awareness and decrease stigma," Dunham added. "I take reproductive choice in America more seriously than I take literally anything else, and therefore own full responsibility for any words I speak that don't convey this truth clearly.

"My life is and always will be devoted to reproductive justice and freedom."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CELEBS ON INSTAGRAM

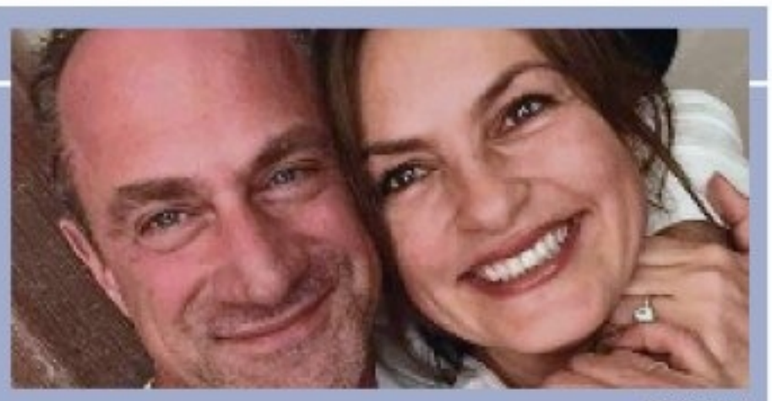
SVU crew's reunion

Former Law & Order: Special Victims Unit co-stars Mariska Hargitay and Christopher Meloni are celebrating the season with a holiday selfie.

Meloni posted a picture of himself with his arm around Hargitay on his Instagram on Tuesday, along with the caption, "Friends at Xmas." Meloni and Hargitay starred in SVU for 12 seasons before Meloni left in a contract dispute.

They have reunited on several occasions since, including at a 2013 event for Hargitay's Joyful Heart Foundation charity.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



INSTAGRAM

JOHANNA SCHNELLER WHAT I'M WATCHING

The late Cindy Stowell pictured with Alex Trebek. CONTRIBUTED

Real-life Jeopardy more than a game

THE SHOW: Jeopardy, December 20, 2016

THE MOMENT: The sixth win

You could feel North America holding its breath. Cindy Stowell, who died from colon cancer on December 5th, was still alive on Jeopardy, after winning five games in a row. (She taped her games in August. The producers and host Alex Trebek knew of her condition; her opponents didn't.)

But here in the sixth game, things are looking dire for the tiny, soft-spoken science content developer with the chic pixie haircut. She enters the final jeopardy round well behind opponent Julia Kite. The question is insanely specific: "If this U.S. state was a country, it would have been in the top 10 in gold medals with 14 — 9 of them by one man and one woman."

Cindy unveils her answer: Maryland. Correct (Michael Phelps is a Marylander). She unveils her wager: $10,201.00. That puts her one dollar ahead of Julia.

Julia unveils her answer: Ohio. America whoops.

You don't really think of Jeopardy as a marketing mastermind, but they are handling this expertly. They kept Cindy's illness quiet for her first few games. As she approached win number five, a story appeared in The New York Times, and went viral.

Now, at the end of this divisive year, Americans of all stripes are gathering before their TVs as if they're hearths, at that time of evening when the holiday lights begin to twinkle, to root together for someone because she's tough and humble and intelligent.

Cindy's six-day total is $103,803, which she's donating to cancer research. Expect high ratings for tonight's show. Somewhere, Charles Dickens is smiling.

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

metro HOME
Your essential daily news

A snow globe starring a loved one makes a great DIY gift

Central T.O.

Project overview

Axis boasts a great location with a lively cultural scene and solid area amenities. The 38-storey building will put a playful spin on the rectilinear point tower and six-storey podium, with a honeycomb-like geometry marking the building's balconies.

Housing amenities

Amenities include a 6,500 sq. ft. fitness facility. There's a grand, two-storey lobby with furnishings by Fendi. Shared workspaces are inspired by the open and collaborative working environments of some of the world's most successful tech companies.

In the area

It doesn't get much more downtown than this. Within walking distance is Loblaws' flagship Maple Leaf Gardens location, the shops and restos along Yonge Street, the Toronto Eaton Centre, the University of Toronto and Ryerson University.

Location and transit

Axis is located near Church and Carlton, along the TTC College streetcar line. It's a quick walk to the College subway station. There are numerous downtown bike lanes, and it's a short drive to the Gardiner Expressway.

DUNCAN MCALLISTER/FOR METRO

NEED TO KNOW

What: Axis Condos
Builder: CentreCourt Developments
Location: 411 Church St.
Sizes: From 468 to 775 sq. ft. studio, one bedroom plus den, two bedroom, two bedroom plus studio, two bedroom plus den
Pricing: From the low-$300,000s
Suites: One bedroom plus
Sales Centre: 19 Grenville St., by appointment
Phone: 416-386-0087
Website: axiscondos.com

Urbanation gives their 2017 forecasts

CONDO TRENDS

Foreign ownership remains modest: rep

Duncan McAllister
For Metro Canada

A cluster of condos are seen from Spadina Avenue. Inset: Pauline Lierman of condo think-tank Urbanation does not see the city having an excess of condos any time soon, due to the ongoing growth of the city. DUNCAN MCALLISTER/FOR METRO; INSET: CONTRIBUTED

Urbanation is Toronto's think tank for all things condo. Founded in 1981, they're the authoritative source on the Toronto condominium market.

Pauline Lierman, Urbanation's director of market research, gives us an insight on what to expect of the GTA condo market going into the new year.

The question on everyone's minds is where new condo prices are headed in the new year. Lierman is optimistic that we'll see some growth in 2017.

"I think that you will start to see a gradual rise. Bear in mind, the price growth has been fairly tepid the last three or four years, so it's mainly been two per cent price growth."

"It's also being led by the resale market as well. That has been allowing some of the new condos to start to push up. Generally when the resale goes up, that's a leading indicator for us."

With all those cranes in the air, is there likely to be a condo glut when all this new inventory comes onto the market?

"I can't see it right now simply because of employment growth in the city and demand," says Lierman. "Projects that are going to the forefront now are not going to be delivered until four to five years from now."

"We still had just under 50,000 units still under construction as of last quarter, so we're still going to see those completions. It's just been slower this year in terms of actually adding supply."

There's also the perception that foreign investors are flocking to the downtown core, buying up all available condo units, sight unseen. Is that really the case?

"The foreign ownership issue, it's just not playing out for us. We averaged it about five per cent."

While zoning on foreign ownership stats, Urbanation found a large number of domestic investors with some projects. "The domestic investor quotient can run upwards of 60 per cent higher in certain, very downtown projects."

"We track the GTA, so it was interesting to see some of that show up in projects that were on the outskirts of the GTA. You've got these local domestic investors going to buy units, and they live there, in areas like Burlington, Milton and Georgetown."

And with housing prices on the rise, Lierman says that rental buildings are once again in demand. "We are seeing an increase in purpose-built rental going through the approval process. You will see a gradual rise on that end."

Before a building is done, developers will start moving people in on the lower floors while upper floors are still being built. ISTOCK

LEGAL MATTERS

Understanding interim vs. final closing

Jeffrey Cowan
For Metro Canada

Q: I have purchased a pre-build condo from a developer and it is coming close to completion. The builder has contacted me and given me an interim closing date and I am not even sure what this means. Apparently, this is not final closing. What is the difference?

A: Condo towers are built from the bottom up so it is conceivable that the living units on the lower floors could be ready for occupancy while the units on higher floors are not ready to be lived in.

So, in order to get the purchasers into the completed units and therefore transfer the cost of carrying the units to the purchasers, builder's contracts make provisions for interim closings.

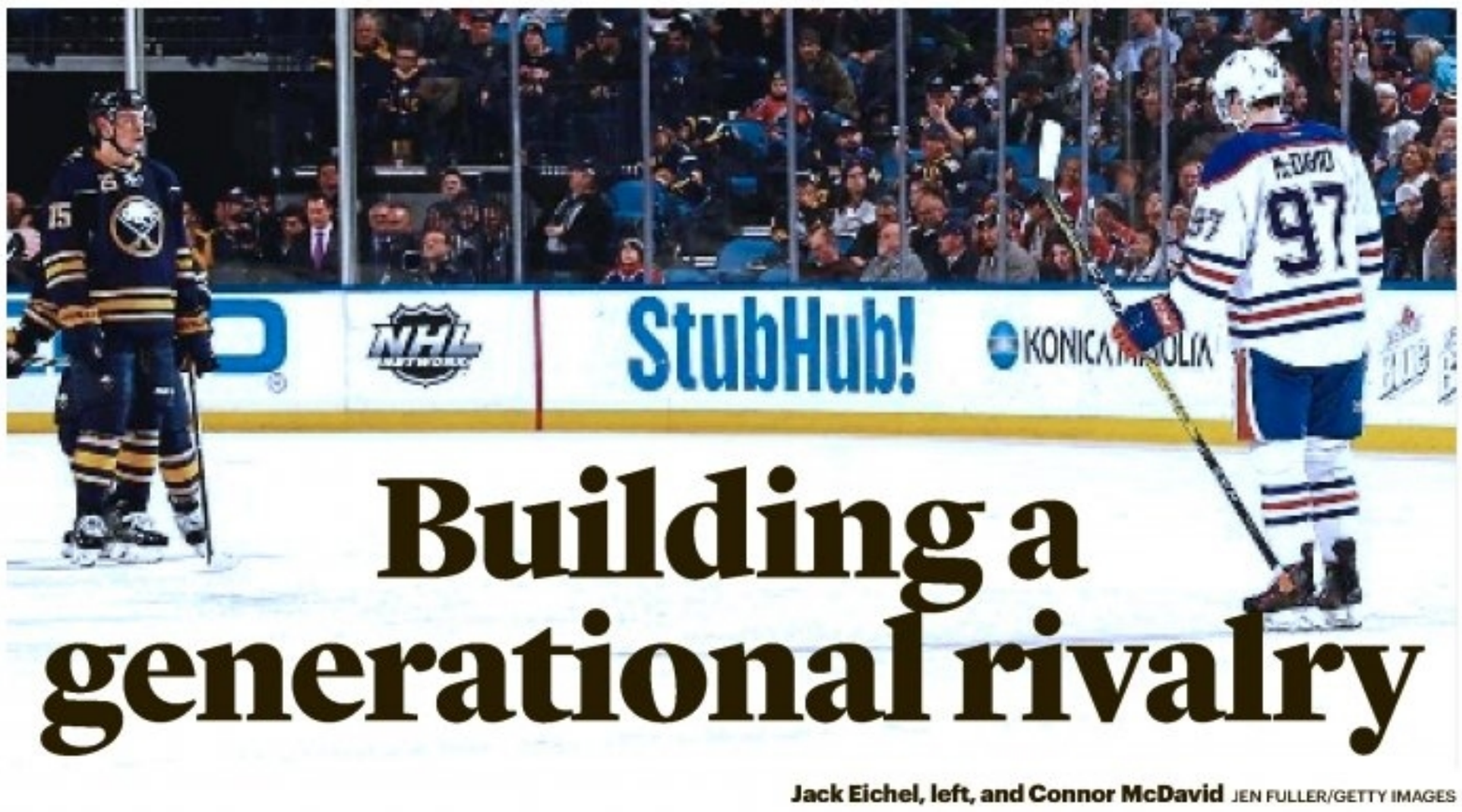
During this interim period, purchasers take possession and pay a monthly occupancy fee that includes estimated taxes, estimated common expenses and the carrying costs of the deferred portion of the purchase price that still needs to be paid.

Once the building is complete and all of the owners have taken interim possession, the builder's lawyer can register the bylaws and other documents for the condominium and the units are then ready to transfer the ownership.

It is at this time that you will need to obtain your financing from the bank and take final title to your new home.

metro SPORTS

A new NBA labour deal was reportedly on the verge of being finalized after owners voted Wednesday to approve a proposed seven-year CBA



Building a generational rivalry

Jack Eichel, left, and Connor McDavid JEN FULLER/GETTY IMAGES

NHL

McDavid leads the way in next marquee matchup

No matter where the Edmonton Oilers travel, captain Connor McDavid is confronted by the same questions and comparisons to the opposing team's star.

In Buffalo, it's Jack Eichel, who was selected second in the 2015 draft behind McDavid. In Toronto, it's Auston Matthews, the No. 1 pick last June.

In Pittsburgh, it's Sidney Crosby, the obvious measuring stick for the NHL's entire "Next Generation" crop of youngsters.

Intriguing as the discussions are, McDavid would prefer not to be involved.

"I think it can be a bit of a sideshow sometimes," the NHL's points leader said during a recent stop in Buffalo, where his budding rivalry with Eichel was broached. "It seems like there's a new guy everywhere we go."

The same applies to Oilers coach Todd McLellan, who enjoyed a firsthand glimpse of the league's top young stars while coaching the 23-and-under Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey in September.

2006

The last time the Oilers qualified for the playoffs.

"You'd like to capture that and reproduce it during the winter, but that's really, really hard to do with 82 games and 30 teams," McLellan said. "But for us, I get asked those questions night after night after night."

McLellan would rather place the focus on his entire squad and not just McDavid, who at 19 has enough weight on his shoulders.

"Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is a former first overall pick, Leon Draisaitl: these players have to not take a backseat," McLellan said. "They have to step up and lead as well. And Connor can't do it by himself every night."

Team versus individual aside, the comparisons won't stop any time soon. And in years to come, the buzz will increase particularly once the torch of the NHL's marquee matchup, which used to be Wayne Gretzky versus Mario Lemieux, is passed on from Crosby versus Alex Ovechkin.

NBC broadcaster Pierre McGuire is intrigued by the many possibilities, all of which involve McDavid, whom he already regards as the league's second-best player behind Crosby.

Aside from Eichel and Matthews, McGuire points to the Winnipeg Jets' young tandem of Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine as natural rivals to McDavid. Unlike Toronto and Buffalo, who play in the Eastern Conference and meet Edmonton just twice a season, the Jets play in the West.

The prospect of seeing the Canadian-born McDavid facing off against the U.S.-born Eichel led McGuire to lobby the NHL to continue playing on the international stage.

"That's why we have to go to the Olympics, for this to flesh out," he said. "That's what creates a lot of these gigantic rivalries." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Lowry funds kids' toy shopping spree

They tumbled out of the bus all smiles and anticipation, a group of 26 Toronto kids about to celebrate Christmas like they never had before.

And as they trundled into the toy store in the early morning hours, ready to ravage the shelves on an all-expenses-paid shopping spree, there at the end of the line came the choreographer of the event, his smile as wide as any of the youngsters eager to get started.

Kyle Lowry might have been having as much fun as any of the kids he treated to a Toys R Us shopping spree as part of his annual holiday celebration Wednesday morning.

"I want to make children have faith in that something good will happen to them in their lives," the Toronto Raptors point guard said.

> **I want to show them support for the way they supported me.**
> Kyle Lowry

"It might not be the biggest thing, but it's more about me and my wife (Ayanha) wanting to give back to the community that we live in, that we're a part of, that supports us."

The shopping event saw 26 students from St. Paul Catholic School let loose for a 15-minute spree. It was a surprise sprung on them by Lowry during an appearance at the school's breakfast earlier in the morning. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

MLB

Slugger taken aback by Jays' quick trigger

Edwin Encarnacion might have been signed to a new contract with the Blue Jays by now, had it not been for a compressed signing period that gave the popular slugger no time to consider his market, his agent says.

Paul Kinzer, who is representing Encarnacion in what is now a sluggish free agent market for power hitters, said Encarnacion was taken by surprise when Toronto signed Kendrys Morales "two days" after they offered him a reported four-year, $80-million deal.

Edwin Encarnacion GETTY IMAGES

"They told us they'd be signing other players, that wasn't a surprise to us," Kinzer told the Jeff Blair Show on Sportsnet radio Wednesday morning.

"But signing someone (Morales) two days later, that was a surprise."

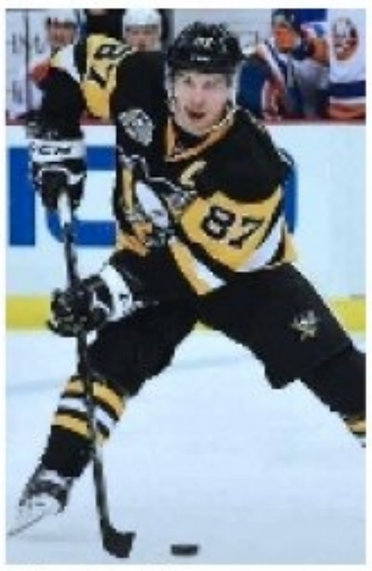
Encarnacion remains unsigned, though Kinzer said his client has at least six offers to consider. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Streaking

The Columbus Blue Jackets set a franchise record by winning their 10th straight with a 3-2 shootout victory over the Kings on Tuesday. They also have points in 12 consecutive games, going 11-0-1, one short of matching a franchise-best 12-0-1 run to close the 2014-15 season.

Slumping

The New York Islanders power play has converted a league-worst 12 of 88 chances and has yet to score more than twice in one game. It's not as if the power play is contributing to wins. The Isles are 4-4-4 when scoring with the main advantage.



Sidney Crosby GETTY IMAGES

League leaders

22

Goals: Sidney Crosby, PIT

Points: Connor McDavid, EDM, 40

Game-winning goals: Artem Anisimov, CHI, and Jeff Carter, LA, 6

Ice time per game: Dustin Byfuglien, WIN, 27:36

Wins: Sergei Bobrovsky, CBJ, 19.

IN BRIEF

TFC opens next year in Utah

Eighty-four days after Toronto FC lost the MLS Cup final to the Seattle Sounders, the Reds will be back for the 2017 season.

The defending Eastern Conference champions will open their next campaign in Utah, where they will take on Real Salt Lake on March 4.

After another road match against the Philadelphia Union on March 11, TFC will return to BMO Field to host Sporting Kansas City on March 31. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Canadian ski cross racers win silver, bronze medals

Germany's Heidi Zacher won gold Wednesday at the ski cross World Cup while Canadians Marielle Thompson and Georgia Simmerling joined her on the podium in Innichen, Italy.

Simmerling, from West Vancouver, B.C., had the lead for most of the big final before slipping to third. Thompson, from Whistler, B.C., took the silver to retain her lead in the season standings. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Big Finn making waves in Arizona

NCAA BASKETBALL

Seven-footer Markkanen a tough mark with Wildcats

Arizona's Lauri Markkanen has a decidedly Nordic demeanour: Serious, straightforward, understated.

The seven-foot Finnish forward has much more flash on a basketball floor, flying for dunks, dropping three-pointers, slipping bounce passes to teammates.

"It's almost like he has the game of a six-foot-seven forward, he just happens to be seven-foot," Arizona coach Sean Miller said.

He also happens to be one of the NCAA's best freshmen.

Blessed with deep shooting range and an ability to put the ball on the floor, Markkanen plays more like a shooting guard or small forward.

Play him too tight on the perimeter and he has the skill to get to the rim or pull up for a jumper. Play off and Markkanen will drain three-pointers all night.

His unique combination of skill and size make him a difficult match-up for anybody.

"If he's hitting the outside shot like that, there's not much you can do," Texas Southern coach Mike Davis said after Markkanen hit five threes and scored 19 points in Arizona's 85-63 home victory on Nov. 30.

Markkanen comes by his do-it-all-abilities through family.

His father Pekka played a season at Kansas, professionally in Europe and on the Finnish national team, as did Lauri's mother, Riikka. One of Lauri's brothers, Eero, is a pro soccer player and the other, Miikka, played basketball until retiring due to injuries.

"I just got better because of that," Lauri said of growing up among athletes. "I just wanted to beat them so bad, I just kept working on my game."

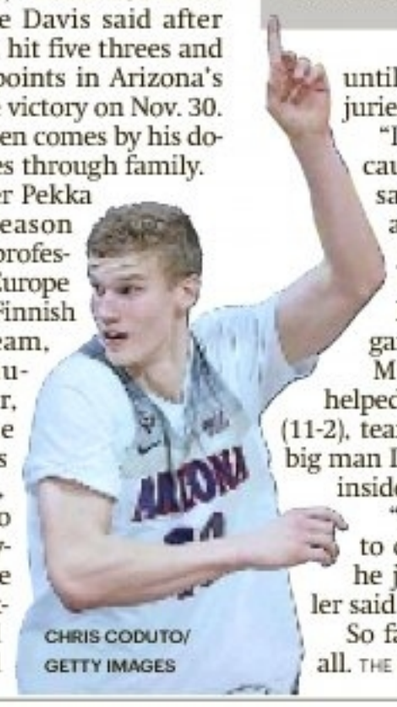
Markkanen has helped carry the Wildcats (11-2), teaming with Serbian big man Dusan Ristic on the inside.

"We're asking him to do everything and he just got here," Miller said.

So far, he's handling it all. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

16.1

Markkanen leads Arizona with 16.1 points and 7.3 rebounds per game while shooting 48 per cent from the floor and 43 per cent from three-point range.



CHRIS CODUTO/ GETTY IMAGES

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MAKE IT TONIGHT

Comforting Slow Cooker Chicken Stew

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

Just a bit of prep in the morning and you'll come home to a satisfying dinner.

Ready in 6 hours 10 minutes
Prep time: 10 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 6 chicken thighs
- 1 potato, peeled and cubed
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 4 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 Tbsp fresh thyme (1 tsp dried)
- 1 or 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 cup flour
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken stock
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 1/2 cup light cream

Directions

1. In a Dutch oven or high-sided skillet, sauté onions, celery and carrots in splash of vegetable oil for about five minutes.

2. Add flour, thyme and bay leaves and stir for a minute. Add stock and stir until smooth. Simmer for 3 or 4 minutes until sauce thickens.

3. Add the potatoes and good pinch of salt and pepper.

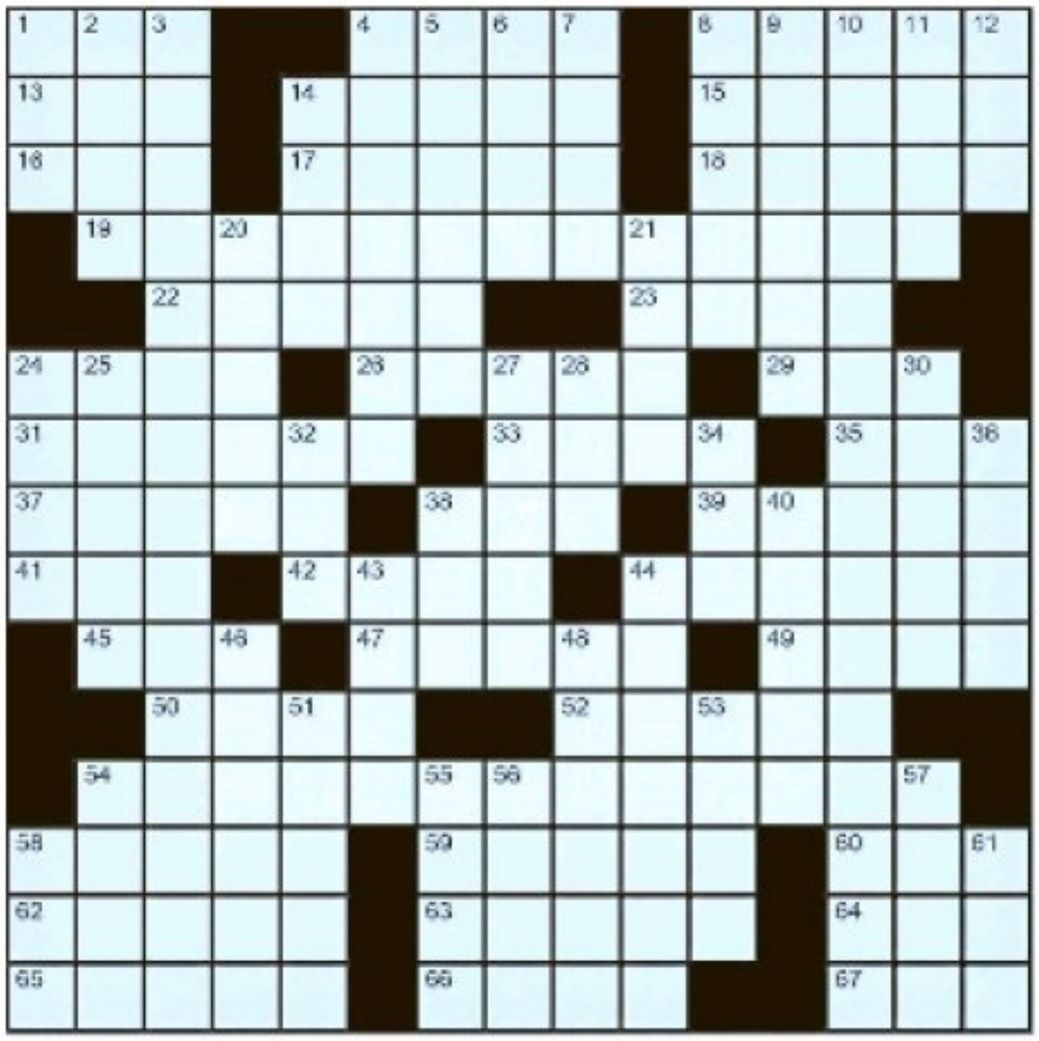
4. Place chicken thighs in the bottom of slow cooker and spoon the vegetable mixture over. Seal and set for 6 hours.

5. Add peas and cream and cook for 10 more minutes. Serve plain or over mashed potatoes.

FOR MORE MEAL IDEAS, VISIT SWEETPOTATOCHRONICLES.COM

CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Australian boot maker
4. Snowplow's creation
8. Cosmetics brand
13. For
14. Angels and Earthly Creatures writer, Elinor _
15. Jeweller's eye piece
16. Lawn roll
17. Chicago's airport
18. The _ (Poem by British poet William Blake)
19. Signs indicating that Santa and his delivery crew have just landed: 3 wds.
22. _ havoc
23. Nobel Peace Prize city
24. Money Object link: 2 wds.
26. French painter Mr. Dufy
29. Sotheby's fare
31. Liveliness
33. Mr. Kilmer's
35. Drummer Mr. Cool
37. Until this moment: 2 wds.
38. Tommy Jones connector
39. Laughs
41. Note before Lah
42. Air freshener target, variantly
44. Toronto college; or, Roman statesman
45. Never: German
47. On a ship, _ _ sea
49. Nero's 602
50. Coin insertion place
52. Canadian sweets shop, _ Secord
54. Bit of "We Three Kings of Orient Are": "Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying / Sealed in the _-_ _..."
58. Unflappable
59. Take apart shoelaces
60. Antiquity
62. _ _'oeuvre (Appetizer)
63. Self-righteous
64. Mr. Orbison
65. Showbiz performer Martha's
66. Canadian director Mr. Egoyan
67. _-inspiring

DOWN
1. Sit-_ (Exercises)
2. David of "Rhoda"
3. What it's predicted Rudolph will do at the end of his Christmas tune: 4 wds.
4. How to completely memorize something: 2 wds.
5. Sarah Palin's state
6. De _, Robert
7. Ardent
8. Some choral voices
9. One of Montreal's Concordia University campuses
10. Have fun with photos posing: 4 wds.
11. Imitates
12. "_ darn tootin'!"
14. Created tapestries
20. Storm aka _ Munroe, Halle Berry's character in "X-Men: Days of Future Past" (2014)
21. Bun
24. 'Violin' suffixes
25. Serving _ (Dinnertime utensil)
27. Obvious
28. Dubai's locale, commonly
30. Ms. Bingham of "Baywatch"
32. "Letters from _ Jima" (2006)
34. Particular pronoun
36. Mr. Morales
38. Mr. Ferrigno
40. Prefix meaning 'Male'
43. Fawn
44. The Olympic _, in Montreal
46. Author S.E. Hinton = Susan _ Hinton
48. The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' album tune: "It's _ _ Much"
51. Where musicians store their songs: 2 wds.
53. Driving 4x4s, commonly
54. Ancient colonnade
55. Lipton _-_-soup
56. Kool & The Gang's "Get Down _ _"
57. Gust
58. Stock unit [abbr.]
61. Hair tinter

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
This is a wonderful day to enjoy the company of others, especially partners and close friends. You also will enjoy dealing with members of the general public.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Work-related travel is likely today. Fortunately, you feel upbeat and happy, especially relating to co-workers and customers. People will be honest and candid with you today.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
This is a fun-loving day! You will enjoy social outings, sports events and playful activities with children. Seek out opportunities to express your creative talents.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
Family conversations will go well today, especially with female relatives, moms and aunts. Explore real-estate opportunities; however, wait until tomorrow to act with purpose.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Today you feel quite content with your world. This is why you will enjoy chatting with siblings, neighbors and relatives. It feels good to be upbeat and optimistic.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
This is an excellent day for business and commerce. Travelling for work is very likely. Nevertheless, postpone important financial decisions until tomorrow.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Today it's easy to feel sympathetic and generous to others. In part, this is because you feel fortunate, but you also have a concern for the welfare of those who are less fortunate.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
You feel content today, which is why you are happy to work behind the scenes. Your busy pace lately has been a bit exhausting, and you know it!

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
A conversation with a friend or a member of a group might encourage you to be more ambitious about your future goals. Consider these today; however, wait until tomorrow to finalize anything.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
People notice you today. They might even learn information about you. Just be aware of this in case you want to guard your privacy. Be aware of your reputation.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Do something different today, because you are upbeat and eager to explore new situations. In particular, you want to learn something new that interests you. Travel if you can.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
In many ways, you will benefit from others today. Someone might do you a favor or make a promise. Wait to find out if this promise will ring true.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

9				5				2
						3	8	
		2	9	1			6	
		1						
4		3		2		7		5
						8		
	1			9	5	2		
	4	8						
7				6				4

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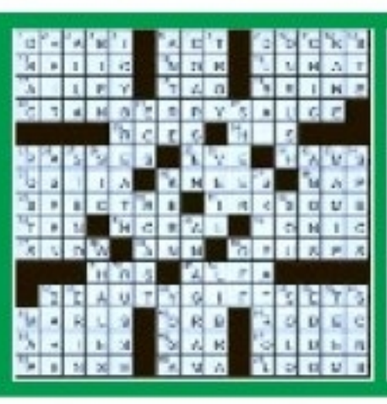

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7	2	8	6	9	4	3	1	5
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4	7	5	2	1	6	8	9	3
9	3	6	5	4	8	7	2	1
6	5	2	1	3	9	4	8	7
3	4	7	8	6	2	1	5	9
8	1	9	4	5	7	6	3	2

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